

NON-TRADITIONAL PAINTING TECHNIQUES: THE EFFECT OF
THEIR USE ON THE IMAGERY OF MY WORK

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE WORK	4
<u>Red Synopsis</u>	
<u>Scherzo for Red Sugar Coca Colas</u>	
<u>Divertimento</u>	
<u>Rosette Sextet with Black Tears</u>	
<u>Beautiful Blue Sequence</u>	
<u>The Big H</u>	
<u>Flaps and Slats</u>	
<u>Pas de Deux with Silky Orange</u>	
<u>Chocloate Cartouche</u>	
<u>Verklärte Nacht</u>	
<u>The Letter of Commendation</u>	
<u>Bibliography</u>	
III. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	28
<u>Bibliography</u>	
APPENDIX: LIST OF SLIDES	34
BIBLIOGRAPHY	36

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The direction of my work during recent years has progressed from a restrained, minimal style of painting on stretched canvas to a more expressive means of conveying a personal statement. The flat paint areas on the smooth stretched surfaces had become a constrictive method of working which I had explored to my limits.

I experimented with unstretched canvas, using heavier applications of paint in a more expressionistic manner. Stitching was added and combinations of fiber techniques were tried along with painting and dyeing. The use of fabrics other than canvas and the possibilities of sculptural forms were also tentatively explored. These processes and the resulting forms in which the new pieces emerged opened new areas of involvement which were both visually interesting and personally rewarding.

Along with the broader choice of materials and techniques came an unexpected bonus. The images took on an almost primitive appearance, and I began to be increasingly interested in the symbolic associations of the work. I felt as if, for the first time, I had set aside formal criteria and was beginning to have confidence in my own

judgments. I have always been an introspective person, and the idea of trying to articulate the motivation and discover (uncover?) some of the intrinsic meaning of the work interested me.

The purpose of this project was to investigate the use of non-traditional painting techniques on the images of my work. The following questions were specifically considered.

1. When and why in the process do decisions occur concerning the following:
 - A. Subject or idea or motivation?
 - B. Materials?
 - C. Shaping?
 - D. Color?
 - E. Texture or embellishment?
2. Does the motivation change at any point in the process?
3. With the emergence of the final form is there an awareness of content (or intrinsic meaning) which was absent or completely nebulous at the inception?

In this study the relationships between the developing imagery and the changing concepts during the creative process were explored. As work on this project progressed, notes and lists of ideas were kept in my sketchbook. Concurrently material was read which engendered creative

inventiveness and attempts were made to apply these theories to the work.

Eleven pieces were attempted and completed. A description of decisions made during the process was included in the discussion of each piece. Details and the final resolution of each piece of work were photographed at the completion of the study to form a visual record.

CHAPTER II

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE WORK

This project was begun by making some conscious decisions: (1) Work would begin with the processes and materials being used at that time. These would be expanded or eliminated as it became necessary. (2) The symbolism which interested me would continue to be explored, but a search for new forms and new contexts for it would be made. (3) Attempts to trace the motivation through the process and to determine the intrinsic meaning of the content as proposed would be made, but not at the expense of the creative process.

Shortly before beginning this project, I had concentrated on a series of works which I called "Petitions." These were small fetish-like objects woven on the loom from a material constructed of synthetic fibers heat-pressed together rather than woven. Manufactured for use in dressmaking as an interfacing, this material is sold under the trade name of Pellon. Cut into strips and used for weft it did not fray; it accepted acrylic paint as dye readily, and it formed a woven surface which could be painted in the traditional manner with no loose fibers to fuzz up. This versatile fabric was used in all but one piece executed for this project.

In searching for new directions before beginning this project it was suggested that I try to simplify rather than continue to complicate these woven fetish shapes. Another suggestion was that they might be related to something real rather than continuing the numinous connotations. Trying to evoke some of the same feelings with images which would appear less primitive appealed to me. I began to think in terms of developing a strong imagery which would accomplish the same purpose without labeling or telegraphing the answer ahead of time.

Since the fetishes had been organic in shape, with loose threads added to make long thick fringe, I decided to weave small simple geometric shapes of the Pellon with three straight sides and a fourth which sloped to a point in the center. The warp was tied and some short ends were left above and below the knots. After the shapes were dyed with thinned acrylic paint and covered with rhoplex to give body and gloss, they vaguely resembled a house with spiky little threads sticking out along the roofline and the bottom.

These same shapes were constructed from other materials--pressed board, corrugated cardboard, latch-hook rug canvas, and balsa wood--and used in installations with the woven pieces. There seemed to be relationships here either in structure or concept.

It was becoming apparent that this new shape could be a symbol for much more than just a house. It was in essence a little fetish which could be used for some of the ideas I wanted to express. Presented as installations, these parts could be orchestrated in a color sequence, as a code or language, or as an equation (A is to B as C is to D). New systems and sequences could be created out of bits and pieces of the old, and new relationships formed. The possibilities seemed unlimited.

Since using the simplified image along with other constructed or found objects was a new method of working, I did some reading on creativity and the generation of ideas to bolster my confidence as I worked on this project. The Universal Traveler by Koberg and Bagnall (2) had been a good resource book for defining and implementing problem-solving in the past and, through it, I became interested in Synerctics by William Gordon (1).

The word Synerctics, from the Greek, means the joining of different and apparently irrelevant elements (1, p. 3). This is the process used when experts from diverse disciplines are joined in a "think tank" atmosphere. It is equally valuable for individuals involved in creative situations.

Synerctics uses analogy, simile, and metaphor to find relationships between disparate things. It distinguishes between learning (to make the strange familiar) and

innovation (to make the familiar strange). When the work changed from overt to covert fetish images I was in effect attempting to make the familiar strange by inverting, twisting, transposing, and distorting the perception of their reality. By incorporating found elements with the woven or constructed shapes I could alter initially accessible information by tilting it slightly off balance and create ambiguity from that which at first glance seemed logical.

These concepts were excellent idea generators. It was not a search for the intentionally strange or the meaninglessly bizarre, but rather an exploration of expressed or implied comparisons, which, for me, produced intellectual illumination and emotional excitement.

Synergetics theory plays with apparent irrelevancies to evoke new viewpoints. As with Zen, the emphasis is on the process rather than the goal.

Play in the creative process means the activity of floating and considering associations apparently irrelevant to the problem at hand. Play in this sense involves the constructive use of illusion, conscious self deceit, daydreams, and associations in general which seem to imply no immediate benefits (1, p. 120).

It became a game for me to make the apparently irrelevant relevant by oscillating between logical systems (making the strange familiar) and the multiplicity of levels of awareness (making the familiar strange).

A stock of twenty of the woven house shapes in varying sizes was made up and colors for the dyeing and painting were arbitrarily chosen. These elements were used as components in all but one of the works. They appeared either as originally woven or as photographed and Xeroxed images. The work began, and the following pieces are the results.

Red Synopsis
(Slide 1)

A small red woven house shape was photographed and color Xerox heat transfers were made. One image was transferred to a rectangle of cream-colored drapery fabric and glued to the back of a house outline made of thin strips of balsa wood. It was tried with the original woven piece, side by side, one above the other, separated, staggered. The two elements by themselves seemed insignificant.

To give the work visual impact more images were transferred to fabric rectangles and, after much shifting around, arranged in a vertical line with the balsa wood skeleton of the house shape on top. Each succeeding fabric piece overlapped the one below; each piece was hung with T-pins.

Four configurations of the house image were superimposed--the balsa wood skeleton, the Xeroxed images, the T-pins, and the overall shape. The original woven piece

was placed beside this arrangement to make a fifth house version. I left the installation pinned to the studio wall and thought about it as work progressed on another piece.

Gradually I began to have vague ideas that it was a sort of shrine and needed some form of tribute or offering to make it complete. I remembered some birthday candle holders that could be stuck in the side of a cake instead of on top. They were attached to the bottom of the balsa skeleton, white birthday candles were added, and the tribute was sufficient (Slide 1a). The original woven shape seemed extraneous so it was removed. The process had started with the house shape and no indication that it would develop into a shrine at the conclusion.

Scherzo for Red Sugar Coca Colas
(Slide 2)

Since there were many connections between the birthday candles and the house shapes that did not necessarily have to do specifically with either, the second piece began with these elements. A larger house image which had been painted an intense blue was chosen to Xerox. To continue the exploration of presence on the gallery wall, larger, whiter fabric rectangles were chosen, and the blue house images transferred. This piece was oriented horizontally since the previous one had been vertical.

This time there were five balsa wood outlines framing five Xeroxed images. Some improbably red birthday cake sugar roses were glued to the pointed fourth side of the balsa wood skeleton--along the eaves if I wanted to continue to think of this as a house. I knew that it was much more than this metaphorically, but continued to use that terminology for want of a better method.

Once again it remained on the studio wall to puzzle over. The white fabric rectangles seemed to be guest towels hung on the line. Although I resisted labeling them so specifically as such, they did seem to require the border woven an inch or two from the bottom of a towel. This meant several more days of thinking and looking.

Trusting in the Synectics theory of tolerating and accommodating the irrelevant (1, pp. 119-144), for no logical reason it seemed that the border needed to be made up of the words "Coca Cola" repeated over and over. I liked the gurgly sound of the words and the rolling, lyrical appearance of the repeated letters. What this had to do with the birthday ornamentation and the house shape was not clear. It was not that Cokes were drunk at birthday parties or anything that simple. The letters were traced from a Coca Cola can, and Xerox heat transfers were made and ironed along the lower edge of the white rectangles.

The horizontal line of fabric "towels" with the balsa wood shapes hung over them was appealing, although something more was needed for resolution and visual excitement. Work was begun on another piece and this one studied day after day on the studio wall. It was difficult to pinpoint what there was about it that appealed to me. Each part was exactly like all the others. It was monotonous and there seemed to be no point in duplicating the same thing five times.

One day when I was not thinking about the piece at all it came to me that perhaps that was exactly the point, that they were all alike. It might have to do with the row houses in suburbia, the willingness for people to settle for so little in life (to be little carbon copies of each other)--a lot of heavy stuff.

After a lot more thinking along these lines each balsa wood house was labeled with a letter from the birthday cake decorations. The next to the last one (D) was given the blue first place ribbon my daughter had won in a track meet which had been hanging over my desk for years (Slide 2a).

I had been unwilling to expand upon such explicit associations as towels and row houses in suburbia in my sketchbook; by such total identification the evocative power of the metaphor might be eliminated. Even so, the piece had evolved into an expression of unfulfilled monotony.

Divertimento
(Slide 3)

One house shape was taller than the others and was painted in warm browns and oranges. It had a luscious glossy surface, good spiky top and bottom threads, and was one of my favorites. It was chosen for the third piece with thoughts of alluding simultaneously to the real and the unreal, the known and the unknown, by using the Xerox heat transferred images in conjunction with the original woven piece. With this nebulous feeling in mind the parts were shifted and manipulated on the studio wall with T-pins.

The interchangeable parts were endlessly fascinating. My method of working had never been to plan everything out from the inception. There were no detailed sketches. As work progressed changes could easily take place and decisions be made immediately with the separate elements.

Somewhat apologetically I felt that this was a less desirable way to produce art. It seemed that I should know what I was doing, that I should get organized. Instead of long lists of words and pages of written ideas there should be neat, expressive drawings in the sketchbook. Synectics was merely reinforcing my reprehensible (to me) method of working; discipline and interchangeable parts appeared to be incompatible.

The arrangement which produced the best visual results had the original woven shape placed on a blank

rectangle of fabric. Xeroxed images on fabric rectangles were affixed with T-pins vertically overlapping below. The configuration was similar to that of Slide 1. To the left and above there was a balsa wood fragment of a house shape (Slide 3a). Separated by several inches another blank rectangle of fabric was stabbed, impaled, punctured (?) in each corner with the T-pins. A black artificial flower was placed to the left with the stem curving over the top (Slide 3b).

I was becoming increasingly aware that the conscious invocation of metaphorical allusion was determining decisions. At its conclusion I felt that this piece spoke of the destruction of misplaced values which are painful both to a society as well as an individual.

Rosette Sextet with Black Tears
(Slide 4)

Several ideas were being considered when work began on the fourth piece. To add variety to the vocabulary of shapes and techniques a circular form was chosen and another method of construction was explored.

The canvas that is used for making latch-hook rugs was selected as a base for the circles. It is similar to needlepoint canvas but is made with larger open squares. With a large blunt needle strips of the Pellon were threaded in and out of the holes to completely cover the eight-inch circles. After they were dyed with thinned

black acrylic paint I was still not sure in what direction the work would proceed. I piled the circles up and put them aside. They looked like a stack of plates.

After a few days of not thinking about them I began to have some glimmers of ideas. Some notes were jotted in the sketchbook:

The plate rail in Archie Bunker's living room
(somehow remembered from the television show
which I seldom watched)

The mantel over a fireplace

Whatnot shelves

Corner cabinets

Living rooms when I was a child where mementos, curios, family photographs, hand painted china were displayed. Parlors, I think I mean, opened when the ladies came for the Women's Club meeting. Golden oak double sliding doors that met in the center when closed. Thick whipped country cream on the rich desserts served after the meeting. I had to be quiet and not interrupt. The ladies answered the roll call with the name of their favorite wild flower, or their favorite kind of music.

This was ending up as did most of my notes, completely off the subject. But all this irrelevant rambling in the sketchbook seemed to be the catalyst that generated the new ideas. According to Synectics theory,

The conscious attempt to make metaphors has a stimulating effect upon subliminal abilities to metaphorize in contrast to the apparently depressive effect that "utilitarian" or "logical" preoccupations have upon these abilities. Thus through the use of the operational mechanism the "expert" can learn metaphorically to draw on the richness of the commonplace world of his own concrete perception (1, p. 117).

With the tenuous notion of the plate rail as a starting point a shelf was constructed which was six feet long and three-and-a-half inches wide. Developing the idea of the birthday candles used in Slide 1 further, twenty-three holes were drilled three inches apart in the plank and pink plastic candle holders and pink candles were inserted. The black circles were painted with a thick coat of rhoplex and hung on the wall over the long skinny shelf with T-pins. They were not propped on the shelf as that would give it too definite an identity as a plate rail.

After looking at this for a time it seemed that there needed to be something under the shelf. The blueprint of the ground floor of my old high school was tried. The rectangular shape, the blue color, and the nostalgic associations all seemed wrong for this piece. I considered wallpaper of some kind, cup holders screwed under the shelf with something hung from them, strips of ribbon, or fabric, or paper taped to the wall extending vertically to the floor.

During a period of trial and error which included adding shiny pink paint to the black circles, an answer was reached that was satisfying. Long black threads were suspended from the candle holders with drops of black sealing wax impressed at the ends. This gave the impression of vertical lines under the shelf but the threads

moved very slightly as the currents of air moved (Slide 4a).

After viewing and thinking about this piece over a period of time the problem still did not appear to be completely resolved. A six-foot length of black heat-pressed fabric bound with a loopy, Pepto Bismol pink satin braid was placed on the floor below the suspended black threads. Although this work appears to have evolved into an expression of loss and sorrow in a form that is again shrine-like, it may still not have reached its final resolution.

Beautiful Blue Sequence
(Slide 5)

This piece began with three woven bright blue house shapes from the original stock. The largest of the shapes had been Xeroxed for Slide 2. A decision was made to work again with larger shapes and brighter colors since my tendency was always to gravitate toward subdued hues and small shapes. The three blue houses were tried in many configurations and juxtaposed with a variety of other objects, but nothing seemed interesting enough to pursue.

Since I had liked the long shelf with the candles in Slide 4, a conscious change in scale was made to a very small shelf made of celotex. An investigation into changing scale was in progress in another work at the

same time. Large cotton cording was being used for the weft in a house shape instead of the strips of Pellon. Unpainted, the cording did not have the beautiful sensuous surface of the original woven pieces. As I wove with it I thought it looked like an umbilical cord. This touched off a flood of associations. I decided to separate the blue houses from the tiny shelf but have them connected by the umbilical cord.

Once again the work was left on the studiowall to look at and think about while continuing another piece. I almost settled for a picture post card from Hilton Head Island propped up on the shelf, but its view of sand and blue sky seemed too color coordinated; the use of the irrelevant was not being explored.

As a whim the thick glass rectangle on which the sealing wax tears for the previous piece had been impressed was tried on the shelf. It seemed just irrelevant enough to appear almost logical, but not quite. I glued a tiny photograph of my daughter in a blue dress to the glass. Over this was placed a rectangular clear plastic "frame" discarded from a newly-purchased box of eye makeup. The glass was propped on the shelf and three candles in holders inserted in front of it (Slides 5a, 5b).

In my notes I wrote, "If the candles were lit there would be dancing reflections in the glass." It seemed

counter-productive to pursue a detailed analysis as to how the piece had evolved into this final form. The motivation had begun with the purely process-related decisions revolving around the blue house shapes. In the end, the work dealt with concerns of symbology.

The Big H
(Slide 6)

The large house image with the fat cotton cording was woven on a frame loom (Slide 6a). This represented a giant leap in scale from the original house shapes. Without having to think and ponder so much this time, it seemed right to again connect the house to a tiny wooden shelf with the umbilical cord. A thick wooden ring found in my father's general store after his death was the first and only thing tried on the shelf this time (Slide 6b). In trying to analyze why it seemed right immediately when the previous decisions had taken so much time, the following notes were made:

To catch the ring on the merry-go-round

Fairy ring

Wedding ring

Ring of the Niebelungen

Wagner's Ring Cycle

Ring around the Rosey

Ring true

Ring-worm

Ring up the curtain

Ring out (the old, ring in the new)

Toll (For whom the bell--)

Chime

Clang

Peal (Peel, strip, Let me--en-ter-tain-you)

Wreath, garland, crown halo

Ring-a-ding-ding

Appearing to be none of these, yet a combination of all of them, I felt that the meaning of the work at the conclusion dealt with symbiotic relationships.

Flaps and Slats
(Slide 7)

I had become so enamored with the shelves that a stock of them was made up out of white pine so that work on several pieces could proceed simultaneously. While working on the eight-inch circles for Slide 4 smaller circles had been made up. These were three inches in diameter, painted a red violet, and covered with rhoplex.

Instead of beginning this piece with no ideas, a subject was arbitrarily chosen. To see how the development of concepts would be affected, it was done in as straightforward a manner as possible. Cookies and milk, cookies and ice cream were the subject matter. What could be more straightforward and banal than that?

I attempted to buy some beautiful synthetic ice cream which was so real it appeared to be melting before my eyes. The shop people told me that it was not for sale and that it was no longer being manufactured. After calling around to find something similar with no success, I made a scoop of ice cream and cast a glass of milk in a styrofoam cup from Sakrete cement.

Three of the rhoplexed cookies, several latch-hook circles of the same size painted black, and the cement ice cream were placed on one shelf (Slide 7a). On the second shelf I placed the rest of the cookies and the cement milk (Slide 7b). Once again the two shelves were connected by the cotton cording. With little reflection decisions were made to install the shelves back to back on either side of a vertical panel and to tie off the cotton cord in sections. (So that it could be snipped at any point?)

Although the intention had been to do a piece with a definite subject from the beginning, the analogies had taken over once again during the process. There were many symbolic associations in a cement scoop of ice cream that would never melt away, a glass of milk cast forever in stone, and two shelves tied together by a cord even though they were on opposite sides of a wall. This piece had become a statement reflecting broken ties (past) and changing roles (future).

Pas de Deux with Silky Orange
(Slide 8)

The house shape was cut from the latch-hook canvas, painted black, and pinned with a T-pin above a shelf. Oval shapes cut from the same canvas were treated with strips of the Pellon. Like the house these were dyed black with thinned acrylic paint and placed on a second shelf. The intention was to link the two shelves again, but a change was needed from the cotton cording. Umbilical cords did not necessarily have to be umbilical looking.

Thin silky orange cording was tied through the holes in the house image and run through a brass screw eye at the left of the shelf (Slide 8a). The other end of the cord ran through a brass screw eye on the second shelf and tied around the six black ovals (Slide 8b). Coils of orange cording lay on the floor between the two shelves.

It soon became apparent that the work again dealt with ties: ties that bind, being bound by a silken cord, being tied up, tied down, tied in, tied off.

Chocolate Cartouche
(Slide 9)

I chose to go back to one small shelf connected by a cord to another object. One of the house shapes had an irregular roofline; one side was long and sloping and

the other was short and cut off. The shelf was pinned to the wall of the studio, the brown house shape was pinned above it with T-pins, and the thinking process took over.

While working with another piece and manipulating the white cotton cording and the black latch-hook canvas circles, I had thought of coiling the cording and alternating it with the black circles, stacking them on top of each other. Once again, as in Slide 1, it seemed that the house and shelf were shrine-like. The house shape was the icon; the stacked cording and canvas were the tribute on the shelf below (Slide 9a). A long length of cording came from the top of the stack, draped around the shelf, and fastened through a small brass ring to the side of the house with a T-pin. I liked the result but realized I was inadvertently back in the cookie business. My tribute was reminiscent of a stack of Oreo cookies.

Although I did not want to label any of these pieces specifically as shrines, again that connotation was evident at the conclusion. This work dealt with some of the same concerns as previous pieces--the difficulty of accommodating the demands which hinder the search for self.

Verklärte Nacht
(Slide 10)

During the time work proceeded on this entire project materials had been manipulated, changes made in surfaces, shapes, and scale in an attempt to make an interesting,

varied, but cohesive body of work. Toward the beginning while searching for ideas I had been struck by the similarity of the gridlike structure of the woven surfaces and a waffle. There was an obvious connection between a waffle and a house and a less obvious connection which concerned one of the definitions of the word waffle. Used as a verb it could mean to speak or write evasively, to be willfully misleading. Colloquially, "waffling on a deal" meant to back out or change one's mind. I made a diagram in my sketchbook which read:

house		school
home		growth
hearth		artist
mother		waffle

For the last two pieces in the project round toaster waffles were purchased from the frozen food case at Kroger as a confirmation that "The ability and willingness to use the apparently irrelevant imply a redefinition of what constitutes relevancy" (1, p. 123).

The waffles were dried on a rack in the hot sun for a few days, rhoplexed several times to seal them, and sprayed with bronze paint. They were authentic little icons equal, in my opinion, to baby shoes forever encased in metal to perpetuate the memory of a first step.

A single waffle evoked memories of the harvest moon (if I were willing to deal with the irrelevant in order to redefine it--and I was). In the sketchbook I wrote:

Moon

Harvest moon

Big old gold shiny harvest moon.

Verklärte Nacht. Transfigured night. Arnold Schon-
berg music. American Ballet Theater. Stunning
ballet.

I pinned the house shape to the studio wall, propped its spindly thread legs on a small shelf, and pinned a bronzed waffle above and to the right of it. It seemed appropriate that a dumb little house shape on a shelf and a bronzed waffle could add up to a transfigured night. My statement was an ambivalent one contrasting fantasy and the nature of reality.

The Letter of Commendation
(Slide 11)

For the last piece in this study one of the dull brown house shapes was repainted a creamy white for more visibility and covered with rhoplex. More waffles were rhoplexed and bronzed. I pinned the house shape to the wall over a shelf with thoughts of using the waffles as a tribute. A plywood platform was constructed, the waffles piled on it, and placed on the floor under the shelf.

Upon reflection, the shelf seemed dull, the platform seemed obvious, and the whole piece seemed trite. The shrine configuration had been fully explored in previous pieces; more thought was required.

In experimenting to find solutions, the shelf on the wall and the platform below were successively connected with black cording, pale green narrow ribbon, and white twine. None of them seemed right for this situation. A border made up of rows of fingernails cut from a Revlon magazine advertisement was glued around the edge of the platform. This added interest but was not the final answer.

At last the shelf was removed leaving the house shape alone on the wall; around it I pinned the waffles with T-pins (Slide 11a). The plywood platform was removed from its base and placed on the floor below leaning against the wall. One large bronzed waffle was pinned to the top and center of the plywood rectangle (Slide 11b). This evoked connotations of notarized documents, presidential seals, or seals of approval. The plywood board with the ornate fingernail border and the waffle seal had become a citation of some sort. If I wanted to think of the house as a metaphor for me, all the waffles pinned to the wall could be golden medals for meritorious service instead of harvest moons.

In the euphoria of having solved the puzzle and won the game I had heady thoughts of titling the piece A Grand and Glorious Tribute to Me. It represented endurance on the obstacle course, and ingenuity coupled with fancy

footwork in a demanding role. None of these idiosyncratic quirks had been present in my thinking at the inception.

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CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of the study I felt that answers had been found for the questions postulated, although they had not come in the manner which had been expected. The most important result was that I had gained considerable insight and confidence in my method of working.

The questions which were addressed are answered as follows:

1. When and why in the process do decisions occur concerning the following:
 - A. Subject or idea or motivation?
 - B. Materials?
 - C. Shaping?
 - D. Color?
 - E. Texture or embellishment?

An important thing learned was that work begins with materials or process. Something intriguing from a previous piece demands more exploration--a specific material, a shape, a texture, or a color. Or a conscious decision is made to change one or more of the above to give a new direction. Never far from the center of thinking are the questions, "I wonder what would happen if . . . ?" and "I'll try this and see . . . "

A decision was made at the outset to continue with the materials being used at that time. The shelves and found objects were added as the process dictated.

Some of the decisions concerning color, shaping, and texture or embellishment were made in advance by constructing a stock of house shapes and dyeing and painting them at the beginning of the project. In other cases decisions were based on a desire for more presence on the gallery wall.

There is generally no subject at the beginning (except in the case of Slide 7 where a subject was arbitrarily chosen as an experiment). There may be a glimmer of an idea but it is not articulated completely even to myself, and I resisted analyzing it in notes. It is this ambiguity which motivates a search for a solution during an incubation period spent in thinking, looking, and trial and error.

2. Does the motivation change at any point in the process?

The answer is definitely yes, and almost immediately. As soon as the manipulation of the materials and the juxtaposing of the found objects begin, ideas and associations come flooding into consciousness and the evocative power of the metaphor takes over. As elements are added or removed or shifted, there is a feeling of designing in a language of patterns, or a code, without a firm grasp

on the key. A period of waiting ensues while the mental processes continue to percolate.

Intellectually there is an attempt to make the familiar strange through the use of analogy and metaphor and to play with making irrelevancies relevant. There is a willingness to float many variables, to give the mind the opportunity to select associations which can lead to new insights.

3. With the emergence of the final form, is there an awareness of content (or intrinsic meaning) which was absent or completely nebulous at the inception?

The answer to this question is, again, yes. Since I was accustomed to seeing glimpses of things observed in travels, or references to the experiences and encounters of a lifetime crop up unexpectedly in finished work, I had expected to be able to track their emergence in the thought processes during the progress of the work. This was not to be the case.

The concept of interchangeable parts and found objects were relatively new to my work. It was simple to alter the whole thrust by changing parts, and along with this shift all the lightning-like associations. It seemed intellectually stultifying to attempt to trace the ideas chronologically or even to be concerned with their explicit origin.

Some of the ideas were too fragile to bear the weight of the words needed to explain them. They seemed to lurk just at the surface of consciousness in a tantalizing, constantly shifting jumble. Each resisted being plucked out alone by clinging to and hiding behind the others. Rather than the specific allusions I had anticipated, the study dealt with more universal, archetypal referents.

At the conclusion, this body of work seems to be an expression of change in a life as well as in a society. It addresses the issue of ambivalence toward change--the need for change, the fear of change, the difficulty of change.

Herbert Read has said:

The virtue of a symbol lies in a relative degree of unintelligibility. A symbol loses its grip once its significance has been rationalized and it has become generally understood. But so long as it remains unintelligible, it can, if it is a good symbol, exercise astonishing power (1, p. 228).

The willingness to tolerate ambiguity and the apparently irrelevant was not a lack of discipline as I had feared, but rather a different, equally valid, and, for me, much more rewarding method of working. There is an awareness of content at the conclusion of a piece which was not present at its inception, and its origin lies in this evolving process.

Ree Morton wrote in her journal simply and succinctly:

you see lots of good stuff when you keep moving around, although it doesn't always register right away. delayed reactions allow for the Fermentation Theory. i have this theory that the hot stuff goes into a storage bin labeled Good Visual Information, cooks around a while, and jumps out whenever it is damn good and ready [sic] (2, p. 56).

For me this leap into consciousness is the result of a carefully cultivated milieu in which analogy and metaphor are allowed to flourish and the play with ideas takes precedence over the analytical process.

Beginning, as I did, with the non-traditional painting techniques, I feel my work has evolved into a strong, rich, and satisfying personal imagery. This has happened in a way that I could not have conceived at the outset.

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2. Swartzman, Allan and Kathleen Thomas, Ree Morton Retrospective 1971-1977, New York, The New Museum, 1980.

APPENDIX

LIST OF SLIDES

1. Red Synopsis
- 1a. Red Synopsis (detail)
2. Scherzo for Red Sugar Coca Colas
- 2a. Scherzo for Red Sugar Coca Colas (detail)
3. Divertimento
- 3a. Divertimento (detail)
- 3b. Divertimento (detail)
4. Rosette Sextet with Black Tears
- 4a. Rosette Sextet with Black Tears (detail)
5. Beautiful Blue Sequence
- 5a. Beautiful Blue Sequence (detail)
- 5b. Beautiful Blue Sequence (detail)
6. The Big H
- 6a. The Big H (detail)
- 6b. The Big H (detail)
7. Flaps and Slats
- 7a. Flaps and Slats (detail)
- 7b. Flaps and Slats (detail)
8. Pas de Deux with Silky Orange
- 8a. Pas de Deux with Silky Orange (detail)
- 8b. Pas de Deux with Silky Orange (detail)

- 9. Chocolate Cartouche
- 9a. Chocolate Cartouche (detail)
- 10. Verklärte Nacht
- 11. The Letter of Commendation
- 11a. The Letter of Commendation (detail)
- 11b. The Letter of Commendation (detail)































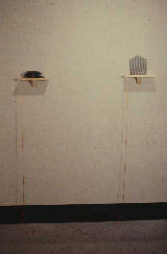
























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